A Single Decision (Take Two)

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Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]
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Chapter Eight

Wherever Esera went, winter seemed to follow her. Spring had just begun on Shumavar, but on Raxus, the first snow of the year had just fallen in the northern hemisphere. Kruth the Courier had proved an awful traveling companion; she'd done the math, he only spoken an average of five sentences a day on their journey. The Polis Massans were, true to what she'd heard, a quiet people. It didn't help that his 'speaking' was actually just typing things out on a datapad for her to read or recite. If he tried to speak to the Separatist Congress like that... Well, it wouldn't be proper.

Esera spent the five days it took them to get to Raxus either sleeping or meditating. Or trying to meditate. The Force was still in that same turbulence that had begun when she heard Grievous had attacked Coruscant. *Why?* she had wondered again and again. What had happened? The spread of the confused turmoil in the Force had been slow enough that if she'd still been in battle, she probably wouldn't have noticed it. But every time she sought peace in the Force, it was stronger. Esera wished her master were here. He'd have an answer.

The arrival at Raxus was a relief, her journey was at an end, but it was also frightening. "I shouldn't have come..." Esera groaned again, as they passed through the defense fleet in orbit.

Now is not the time for fear, Jedi. That comes later, Kruth typed out.

"What do you mean, later?" she asked. "What are you planning to do? And don't call me Jedi in public! They'll lynch me, or something!" None of her statements got a response from Kruth, though.

The snow glistened a golden orange in the setting sun as they came nearer to the surface. Esera was thankful they'd set their dispatch vessel to Raxus time after leaving Polis Massa, they'd gotten over the hyperspace lag already. But hyperspace lag was a tiny problem compared to her current situation. Here she was, on Raxus, the heart of the Confederacy, with R8-M5 as her only ally in the world. If she was caught, that would be it. Game over. *Fear is the mind killer,* her master had told her, but she felt it all the same. When they landed and the security droids came up to their ship, the shaking returned to her hands and knees, and she began to sweat. They were just battle droids, but they could bring something far worse down on her.

Luckily, the droids suspected nothing. Kruth wrote to her that no one cared about another human among hundreds of billions in the galaxy. As long as she didn't break out her lightsaber and start using magic powers, she'd be fine. The lightsaber at least was hidden in R8, who was going to stay with the ship. Still, Esera could hardly sleep. It didn't help that the ship's beds were designed for Polis Massans... Kruth was too cheap to find an inn or hotel in the city. To be fair, it was likely none of them had Polis Massans in mind any more than this ship had humans in mind.

In the morning, they put on their best clothes. Kruth wore his most formal scientist's lab gear, as science was serious business among his people. Esera's best clothes were actually her least suspicious; mostly second-hand stuff she'd picked up on Terminus. Almost all of it was too big for her, and smelled heavily of industrial-strength cleaning regents. Who knew who had worn it before she got it; whatever they needed to clean, it probably wasn't something nice. They trudged through growing snowdrifts and hitched a ride on a skybus.

We must be the only delegates going to Congress on public transit, Esera thought. Next to her, an obese Koorivar breathed heavily through a congested nose, and ahead, someone was eating a to-go breakfast with as much slurping and chewing as possible. At least some things were universal in the galaxy, no matter where one went. They had a good view of Raxulon from the bus; it was a much more open city than she had expected. In the summer, it must have been very green, with all those bare trees lining the snowy streets. Getting into the Congress building was surprisingly easy. Esera was amazed that the droids merely checked Kruth's clearance before waving him in. They didn't even go through a scanner! Compared to the endless security theater on Coruscant, this place really was a world apart.

"This is so weird..." Esera whispered, when they entered the actual Congressional hall. The wood panels and green leather cushions were one thing, the fact that she was actually inside the enemy government's own meeting place was another. They found their designated seats and began the wait for this special session to begin. Esera couldn't help but wring her hands and tap her foot.

Do not get jittery, Kruth wrote to her.

"Jittery!?" she hissed, meaning to tell him what, but someone interrupted.

"Hi!" chirped a female's voice. She was almost human, and almost as young as Esera by the looks of it. But the pointy ears and red eyes made it clear she was something else. If Esera had to guess, she'd go with Sephi. "I'm Lirka! I've never seen you here before, who are you? Are you the Subterrel delegates?"

"Uh..." Esera looked at Kruth, who just nodded, before he went back to ignoring everything around him. "Yes, we are representing the Subterrel sector. This is Kruth, and I'm Esera-" She cursed internally, she was supposed to be using a different name here! "Yeah, I'm Esera. I speak for him."

"Neat! You joined us just the other week, so I'm not surprised they haven't given you the proper clothing yet," said Lirka. It was then that Esera noticed all the other Separatists were wearing a grey and blue robe. All of them, from the green-skinned woman at the head of the chamber, to a Sluissi coiled up in the corner, to this Lirka. Esera suddenly felt even more out of place than before.

"Oh... We weren't aware." she said.

"Don't worry, it's just for special sessions where the Count is here in person! Like today!" Lirka beamed brightly, and rubbed her hands together. "I can't wait!"

And then the fear came right back. Maybe if she pretended she was sick, she could get out of this... "So," Esera went on, trying to act normal despite her rapidly growing unease, "um, where do you come from?"

"I'm from Thustra," said she. *Yes, definitely Sephi then.* "My sister and I used to work with Senator Navi on Coruscant, but then the King switched our allegiance, and the Senator got involved, he had a plot to kill the King, the King died, and it was all just a horrible mess. The Senator got arrested, and they wanted to put us under arrest too, so we went back home. The new King asked me to be the delegate to Raxus, since I already had experience. Of course, I said yes, because he's the King, I can't refuse his command! I was kind of scared at first, I made my sister come with me, but this place is actually really nice! Well, some of the people aren't, the arguments get pretty hot in here, I don't like to argue. The fashion scene here is great, though! I mean, the eye shadow thing was a bit odd at first, but I've gotten used to it. Do you think it's overdone?"

Esera could only stare at her in silence. Three weeks ago, she'd been fighting the Separatists street to street on Shumavar with her clone troopers, too exhausted to even protested when the Governor's militia had gassed the rest in their bunkers and tunnels. Now this Separatist was trying to be friendly and babbling on about fashion trends. Her mind could not comprehend it.

Lirka saw her change in mood. "It's too much, isn't it?" she asked, sighing. "I knew it. These Raxus girls really do go overboard."

Is this what I'd be worrying about if I was normal? she wondered. *Is this what normal people think about?* For a moment, she wished she could forget about this whole war and be like Lirka. Ignorance really was bliss. Before Esera could answer, a hush fell over the hall. Everyone looked to the podium at the head of the chamber, where the green-skinned woman was standing aside. Two magnaguards came through the door, placing themselves on either side of it. *Dooku is here!* Esera thought, trembling. Dooku was almost the last person in the whole galaxy she wanted to see, the only person worse than him would be...

Grievous adjusted his cloak one last time. It was the white one with the quilted red liner that drew completely around him, he reserved it for special occasions. Announcing Dooku's death and his assumption of direct control over the Confederacy would be a special occasion for sure. Even the magnaguards got to switch out of their stained and torn cloaks today. He sent two of them in first to signal the civilians that it was time to stop talking. *This is it,* he thought. Grievous had tried to write a speech, but he was no good at that. He'd just make it up as he went, as if he were addressing his commanders. Normally, he would have felt annoyed at having to do this, but he felt strangely at ease today. He stepped through the door himself, and into the chamber.

Immediately, the last murmurs of conversation went dead. Silence fell over everyone. There was already a civilian up here on the podium with him, gaping at him in shock. Grievous stared at her until she got a hold of herself. "General Grievous... It is an unexpected... pleasure to have you here. I am Congress Leader Voe Attel, representative of the Corporate Alliance. What brings you to our hall? Where is Count Dooku?"

"That is why I am here," Grievous said. "Turn the microphone on." The woman did as told, and Grievous looked over the entire chamber. There were no camera droids hovering around here, instead they had fixed cameras mounted high up on the walls. Still, low tech or not, they were being watched. Attel spoke first.

"Let us begin this special session of the Confederate Congress," she announced to the hall. "We... recognize General Grievous, and yield the floor to him."

Grievous coughed, and let his eyes scan the civilians seated below. "Three weeks ago, Count Dooku and I led a raid on Coruscant, intending to capture the Republic's Chancellor. We succeeded in this goal, but I was informed that the Jedi would make an attempt at recapturing their precious Chancellor. Not hours later, two Jedi boarded my flagship in the midst of battle. The Count was with their Chancellor, I decided to join him. And this is what I saw." Grievous pulled out a disk from his cloak, and searched for a place to plug it in.

"Down there," whispered Attel, nodding to the long table bisecting the floor. He turned to this other side, seeing one of those serpents he'd become familiar with on Sluis Van.

"You, plug this in," he ordered, tossing it down to him.

"Yes, sir," said the serpent, who promptly did as told. The three-dimensional security recording was projected into the air, showing the unconscious Kenobi under the fallen catwalk, and Dooku dueling Skywalker, with Palpatine watching from his prisoner's throne. Suddenly, Skywalker grabbed the Count's arms and sliced off both his hands. The entire chamber gasped in shock, but the show had only just begun.

"*Good, Anakin, good!*"laughed Palpatine, as Skywalker held both blades at the Count's throat. "*Kill him. Kill him now.*"

"*I shouldn't,*" Skywalker said.

"*Do it,*" ordered Palpatine. Skywalker hesitated, and then decapitated the Count. Again, the civilians gasped and cried out in horror. Attentive watchers would have noted that the elevator door had opened, and Grievous had just stepped out with his guards.

"*You did well, Anakin. He was too dangerous to be left alive,*" said Palpatine. Skywalker released his grips.

"*Yes, but*-" The two noticed they were not alone anymore.

"*Kill them!*" Grievous heard himself roar, charging down the stairs with all four sabers drawn. An unseen force knocked him backwards, his head hit the steps, and then a hail of blaster fire slammed into Skywalker's chest. Palpatine was gunned down moments later. The recording ended there, leaving the civilians shocked as Grievous had been that day.

"As you see, Count Dooku is dead. He has been dead for three weeks. I do not trust politicians, though, and declined to inform anyone beyond my best commanders of what had transpired, until I could deliver the news in person to this government. I come before you now to accept your oaths of allegiance." Grievous had gotten that last line from a half-recalled memory, of a fire-lit hall and kneeling figures. That was surely a suitable thing for a ruler to say.

If it was, no one was reacting. A stunned silence reigned in the hall. While he waited for a response, Grievous looked at the faces in the crowd. The diversity of creatures present did not surprise him. All eyes were on him... except two. Halfway down the left side of the hall, in the second row, a human woman was not looking at him. No, that was just a girl, not a woman. She was too young to be a politician. She wasn't in those grey and blue robes either, and neither was the mouthless creature next to her. *Subterrel,* their seats were labeled. That was the sector the crab-man Kronaak had annexed. But the girl, she wasn't looking at him. She was checking all the exits in the chamber. That was *not* civilian behavior. Grievous took a closer look with his augmented vision. There were a lot of humans with black hair in the galaxy, there were a lot of humans with blue eyes, there were a lot of humans wearing old jackets... Still, she was suspicious. Maybe even a Jedi. Dooku had told him one made it in here before, that Ahsoka Tano brat. He sent a silent signal to his guards to keep an eye on her.

Finally, someone did something. A Bith stepped onto the floor. "We do not give allegiance to any mere warlord. The Confederacy is built on higher standards."

The serpent he'd sent to play the recording, who was still on the floor, replied: "Under the Constitution of the Confederacy of Independent Systems, the Supreme Commander succeeds the Head of State in a time of war," said he. "We do not have to give our allegiance, by law, he has it already."

"Then what are we waiting for?" exclaimed a burly man, rushing onto the floor as well, before pointing at the green woman at Grievous's side. "Hey, Voe, swear him in already!" She just rolled her eyes.

"If we let Grievous take control, then this war will never end! He lives for war and nothing else!" shouted a human woman.

"I am already in control!" Grievous said. But it was too late, no one was listening, because half the chamber was suddenly on the floor arguing with each other. Grievous was bewildered. After dealing with the cowardly, sniveling corporate tycoons like Nute Gunray and San Hill, Grievous had expected much of the same from this lot. Instead, this place had turned into a madhouse in a matter of seconds. He didn't know if he liked their fighting spirit or was annoyed that they dared refuse him. He turned to Attel. "Is this supposed to happen?" he asked.

"The more we lose in the war, the angrier they get," she sighed. Grievous just growled.

"SILENCE!" he boomed. Everyone looked up now, even the suspicious girl, who was still seated. "In case you forgot, I have a war to win for you. Laws, standards, ideals- do you think they'll matter when the Jedi and their slave-soldiers are burning down this city? That is your future without me."

"You couldn't even kill Palpatine!" someone shouted.

Before he could stop himself, Grievous had vaulted over the podium and slammed down onto the floor with a thunderous crash. One of the wooden boards cracked under his talons, and the shock made him cough. He drew himself up to his full height, towering over them all. "Who said that?" he asked.

And to his immense surprise, someone did step forwards. It was the woman who had spoken before. She was short and stout, and her hair had gone entirely grey. "I said, you couldn't even kill Palpatine." She walked right up to him, arms crossed, with a defiant scowl on her face.

Grievous was bewildered again. This was the part when they were supposed to grovel and beg for mercy! "What is your name?" he asked.

"Tyreca Bremack, Agamar sector."

"Do you have any regard for you own life?"

"Not so long as my people suffer under Republic siege," she said. "If you couldn't kill an unarmed old man, how are you going to protect us?"

"My droids killed him quick enough, on my order. A general does not always do things himself. Otherwise, he would be no general at all," he said. *Shouldn't I have killed her by now for this behavior?* Truth be told, Grievous was fascinated that someone in the galaxy had the guts to speak like this to him. Fascinated, but angry. The only reason he *hadn't* killed her where she stood was because he wanted to hear what incredible thing she'd say next. Yes, that was why.

"Well, you've done a sorry job. You live for war, but you can't win at it! How many times have the Jedi defeated you?" she asked.

Grievous clenched his fists. "I have turned a thousand armies and a thousand fleets into one! I have been shackled by concern for corporate profit margins since the very first day! I have had to manage this war at *every* level because of the sheer incompetence of the underlings you've deemed fit to send me!" He whirled around, and started stalking about on the floor, a hand held behind his cloak, the other pointing emphatically. "No one else alive could have achieved what I have achieved, despite all this! You civilians know nothing of what I have had to deal with. You can reject me if you choose, and I will laugh as you are crushed. Or you can acknowledge my authority, and I will finish what Dooku started. Will you have defeat, or will you have victory? You have until tomorrow morning to decide." With that, Grievous left out of one of the side exits, his magnaguards departing the podium stand as well. The hall exploded into argument again.

Once outside, his thoughts turned to the suspicious girl. "Bring her to me," he told one of his guards. "And do it quietly."

This had been the most whirlwind day of Esera's life. She was taking part in a session of the Separatist Congress, a chatty Sephi Separatist was constantly talking to her, Dooku was dead, Grievous himself was physicallyin the same room as her, someone had talked back to Grievous and lived to tell the tale, and now the Separatist representatives were getting close to a brawling match on a live broadcast! Who knew what would happen next?

A hand tapped her shoulder. Esera turned, and her heart froze at the sight of a magnaguard. "Come with me," it said.

"Huh?" Lirka turned away from the raging 'debate.' "What does Grievous want with you, Esera?"

"The General requests your presence, and he requests you come quietly," said the droid.

Esera felt faint. She couldn't beat a magnaguard, not even with her lightsaber, which she didn't have right now. Beating Grievous without a lightsaber? That was right out!*What would my master have done?* He would accept death with dignity. He'd shown her how.

Esera knew that if she spoke, she'd start stammering, so she just nodded.

"Tell me what he said when you come back!" Lirka said. Kruth just gave her a sorrowful look.

I'm not coming back! Esera wanted to scream.

The magnaguard took her outside the chamber, and through a door that said *Restricted Access*. They went up some stairs, and came into a bare hall lined with windows. Grievous stood with his back to her, looking out over the snow-dusted city. "Who are you?" he asked, without turning.

"The Sephi called her 'Esera,'" the magnaguard reported.

"I didn't ask you," Grievous said.

"Yes. That's my name," Esera squeaked. "Esera Komara." *Get it together! These are your last moments!* she scolded herself. Now, Grievous did turn. He was even bigger and scarier than the pictures in the intelligence reports made him out to be.

"You are not a civilian," he said.

"N-no." Esera swallowed, her stomach twisted, she felt sick. The cyborg walked right up to her, looming so high over her that he blocked out everything else in her vision. He smelled vaguely of oil and linen. She wanted to laugh at that absurdity, she wanted to cry at that being the last thing she ever smelled. *How pathetic!* she scolded herself.

"I have only fought one foe in this war that uses child soldiers," Grievous said. "I've even killed some of them myself."

"I''m- I'm seventeen, actually," she said.

"As I said, a child." Grievous chuckled. That was a strange noise, coming from him.

"If you're going to kill me, at least let me have a little dignity!" she sighed, sounding far too whiny for her own liking.

"You want to die with dignity?"

"Fine, no dignity. Just get it over with!"

"No. Why is a Jedi girl sitting among Separatists?" he asked. "This is the last place one of you should ever be."

"I didn't plan for this, alright? The Polis Massans said I could hide with them if I kept their guy safe here for this session. It was either that or they'd turn me in," she said.

"And why was a Jedi girl trying to hide?"

"Because they think I'm a traitor!"

"Are you?"

"No! Alright, maybe yes. It's complicated! Why do you care?"

Grievous looked at his guards. "A traitorous Jedi?" he asked them, amused. "Let me guess, you turned to the Dark Side?"

"No! Never!" she exclaimed. "I- I- I-" Esera hid her face with her hands, trying to push away everything she was feeling right now. Guilt, anger, fear; they all could lead to the Dark Side, and they all weighed heavily on her. *Stay calm, Esera,* she told herself. It didn't work.

"You what?" Grievous asked.

"I sabotaged the weapons grid on the star destroyer, because they were going to destroy those cities with everyone in them. They had the orders from Holt and everything. I couldn't let them do it. I couldn't!" Esera said. "All my life I was told to do what was right, to help the helpless and defend the defenseless, to go in peace and have goodwill to all living things- What was I supposed to do? Stand there and let more evil happen? I couldn't do it. I wasn't going to let it happen again. I made a choice, and I chose what was right!"

Grievous stared at her, a deadly seriousness in his eyes. "What a sentiment," he said.

"Yeah, well, what would you know of right and wrong?" she spat. Her fear momentarily deserted her, the anger rose to its place. "You're a butcher, you're a murderer, just like Aspar and all the rest! They want me dead, you do too! So just do it already!"

"You seem very eager to die," Grievous tilted his head, giving her a bemused look.

"I don't *want* to die!" Esera seethed, trying to hold onto her anger as best she could. The fear was returning already. "But there is no way in hell I could ever beat you, or even escape from this planet, so I don't see much of a choice here! All I want is out of the war. I can't do it anymore. If this is how it is, so be it." She breathed deeply, and let her hands fall to her side. "I'm ready."

The cyborg took a step back, and reached inside his cloak. *This is it,* Esera thought. No, she wasn't ready at all. Three years as a normal child, eleven as a Jedi in training, three more dragging the galaxy into chaos and bloodshed- was that it? Was that what her life amounted to? Esera had accomplished nothing. No one would remember her, except as a girl knighted too young because her master had died and they needed more generals, who snapped from the pressure and disappeared. No one would ever know she was killed here, in some service hall in the Separatist Congress building. Her parents on Stalimur would always wonder what happened to their child, who was sent off with a Jedi and never ever returned, they would never know she died so close to home. She wished she had more time, she wished she'd been able to make more of a difference, she wished none of this had ever happened, she wished she was back at the Temple, she wished she'd never been taken by the Jedi. The cold claws of fear clamped down on her heart, and Esera closed her eyes, trying not to tremble. She waited for the hiss and hum of the lightsaber.

But it never came. When she opened her eyes again, Grievous was just staring at her with a troubled glare. He had a saber out, but it wasn't activated. He was still as stone, not even blinking. The magnaguards watched impassively. "Go," he finally said.

"What?" Esera asked in a tiny voice.

"You are not worth killing," Grievous muttered, waving at the stairs. "Go and hide, if that is your fate."

She ran for it, back down the stairs and out the door, and back into the chamber where the debate still raged. Esera collapsed back into her seat, breathing ragged breaths. Her hands shook so badly she had to hold them together. *What just happened? Why did he let me go?* That wasn't what Grievous was supposed to do! He was supposed to fly into a bloodlust and kill her mercilessly!

"Hey, are you alright?" Lirka asked, but Esera didn't answer. Even Kruth gave her a concerned look. "Wow, Grievous must be really scary to get you so upset." Kruth typed something on his pad. "I know, right? I can't imagine what got him to notice you. But you're right, she doesn't look well."

"I'll be fine," said Esera, wiping cold sweat from her brow. "It was just... an intense encounter. Maybe I should go back to the ship, Kruth."

"Ship?" Lirka frowned. "You're staying in your ship? How'd you get here?"

Skybus, Kruth typed out.

"How base, how vile!" said Lirka, repulsed. "That simply won't do for representatives of the Confederacy! I've got my own airspeeder, you can come stay with my sister and I."

Take her, he wrote. *She does not sleep well on Polis Massan beds.*

"It's settled then!" cheered Lirka. "You're coming with me, Esera!"

She was in no condition to protest. Esera let herself be dragged away, too shocked to believe she was still alive.

What just happened? Grievous asked himself, watching the Jedi girl flee away. He'd been moments from killing her, the saber was in his hand, but something stopped him. *She reminded me of someone*, he realized. This girl, Esera Komara... There had been someone like her in his life, once. Who? When? Where? Grievous couldn't remember. He looked at the weapon he was holding, and put it back in his cloak.

Never before had he willingly let a Jedi escape. On Coruscant, he'd left Shaak Ti tied up so that she could tell the others of her failure, but that was different. He gained nothing from letting this girl go. A month prior, he would have killed her without hesitation. Today, he'd not only spared the Jedi girl, he'd spared that uppity politician too. What had happened to him? Did those chips his doctor took out really effect his behavior that much?

It was an unpleasant thought. As the politicians argued, Grievous summoned his shuttle, and descended through the Congress building. It was mostly empty, except for some droids here and there. Every now and then, he came upon a civilian official or caretaker; their jaws dropped open and they scrambled out of his way. Grievous paid them no mind, he was deep in his own thoughts. By the time he reached the building's own landing pad, his shuttle had arrived, and he was quickly returning to orbit. Try as he might, he couldn't stop thinking about that Jedi girl.

A traitor... How unusual. A Jedi that didn't turn to the Dark Side had betrayed the Republic. To stop what sounded like an orbital bombardment, no less. She was very adamant that it was the right thing to do. The girl had conviction, and she acted on it, no matter how weak and sentimental it might have been. And then she'd come here, to Raxus. Obviously, she was terrified, it'd shown on her face despite her claim she was ready to die. But she'd stood firm nonetheless, waiting for his strike. He knew the Jedi were supposed to be fearless, but this one clearly wasn't. Still, she stood her ground. She didn't cry, she didn't beg, she held onto dignity, to what she must have thought was the very end. Her courage was undeniable, and Grievous felt a seed of begrudging respect for the girl. He'd never thought he could feel anything but loathing towards Jedi.

And then Grievous had another realization. Whenever he thought of the Jedi, he felt nothing but a burning hatred, a rage that blotted out everything else. For the first time, Grievous wondered why. They'd done something to him, they had to have! A bomb, that was it, wasn't it? They'd bombed his shuttle, and then he became a cyborg. And they bombed his shuttle because...

Why did they bomb my shuttle?

Was he that much of a threat? What had he done to warrant such an underhanded attack from the Jedi? They never did underhanded things, they were too *noble* for that. Grievous was from Kalee, he was Kaleesh, he had fought for Kalee. He fought the Huk, he remembered that. The only thing he hated more than Jedi were the Huk. The Jedi... the Jedi had fought him, he supposed. That must be why he was an enemy of the Jedi. Who had he been, on Kalee? That serpent, the Khedive of Sluis Van, had called him a *lord*. Had Grievous been of high birth? Who had his family been? What happened to them? Where were they now? Did he even have a family?

I know nothing about myself, Grievous thought. The last three and a half years of his life from awakening as a cyborg had been fighting and training, fighting and training. He hated Jedi, he fought clones, he raged at droids. That was it. And now here he was, possibly about to become the leader of the entire Confederacy... He didn't even understand what the war was about, come to think of it. Corruption? Big governments? Jedi needed killing? Grievous didn't know.

Once back in his quarters on Invisible Hand, the questions in his mind only bothered him more. "Doctor!" he barked.

"Yes, master?" the droid asked, emerging from under the stairs of the elevator platform. "I hope this is important, I'm very busy sorting that data we got from the Count's computers."

"Why are we at war with the Republic?"

"What?" A-4D seemed to scowl at him. "I don't know that, master! I'm a doctor, not a politician!"

"Get back to work," Grievous grumbled, turning away to look out the windows to snowy Raxus below. What a weird day this had been.

Author's note: The alternate title was "In which Esera meets a genki space elf, an ornery cyborg, and realizes her life went horribly wrong at some point in the past." Anyways, I'm gonna come out and say this right now, she does not remind Grievous of his huk-killing waifu. This isn't a romance, just check the tags. Oh yeah, Lirka is an actual (old EU) canon character, she showed up on a single page of a comic in 2004 and was named in an out-of-universe source. Talk about obscure, huh? Everyone with a name has a reason to be in this story, including those politicians. Like last chapter, don't worry about remembering them, I'm not gonna throw tertiary characters that had one scene ages ago at you and expect you to know who they are like Robert Jordan did.

COMIN AT YOU FROM THE LAST HOURS OF 2018: Fixed the line issue I never got around to and fixed some punctuation issues.

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